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THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION: THE RHETORIC OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN PAUL

DENISE KIMBER BUELL
dbuell@williams.edu
Williams College, Williamstown, MA 01267

CAROLINE JOHNSON HODGE
cejh@comcast.net
College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA 0l610

In most modern interpretations of Paul's writings and early Christian history, ethnicity is implicitly or explicitly defined as natural, inherent, immutable, or otherwise "given." Paul's letters are often read to support the view that the identities of Christ-believers, in contrast to other Jews, transcend fixed, bodily characteristics we associate with ethnicity and race. After all, Paul's writings include such powerful passages as Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, male and female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse is frequently invoked to support reconstructions of an inclusive and egalitarian impulse in the Jesus movement. For example, Rosemary Radford Ruether echoes Gal 3:28 when she writes that "class, ethnicity, and gender are . . . specifically singled out as the divisions overcome by redemption in Christ."[1]

Our goal is to challenge the conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in such interpretations of Paul and early Christianity. This task arises out of our own interest in the politics and ethics of interpretation, specifically from the view that all reading is ideological.[2] As scholars culturally marked as white and

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[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sexism and God-Language," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 156.

[2] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), esp. 17–30, 195–98; Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 167.

Christian, we feel an obligation to struggle against both racist and anti-Jewish interpretive frameworks that have served to mask and sustain white Christian privilege.[3] This twofold ethical commitment leads us to favor a view of race and ethnicity that is widespread today but not typically used to interpret Paul's writings or early Christian self-definition.[4] Specifically, instead of presuming that ethnicity and race are fixed aspects of identity, we approach these concepts as dynamic social constructs.[5] We see them as characterized by an interaction of appeals to fluidity and fixity that serve particular political and ideological interests. Using this dynamic approach allows us to transform the ways we have been trained to think about race and ethnicity and their saliency for interpreting Paul.

Our proposed model encourages a rethinking of traditional interpretations in which the understanding of ethnicity or race as "given" operates as a foil for a non-ethnic, all-inclusive Christianity. In this binary understanding, earliest Christianity is conceived of as a universal, voluntary movement that specifically rejected the significance of ethnoracial identification for membership and thereby "broke" from its Jewish roots.[6] Since the universalizing image of Christianity is emphatically portrayed as voluntary or achieved, the implied or explicit contrast is a form of community that is involuntary and particular—both features frequently attributed to ethnicity and race.

This understanding of early Christianity has had paradoxical effects.[7] On the positive side, if Paul is interpreted as having defined religiosity as *distinct* from ethnoracial identifications, then Christian practices and structures that contribute to racist and ethnocentric oppression can be viewed as contravening

[3] See Denise Kimber Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition," *HTR* 94 (2001): esp. 456–57. This struggle is also central to the recent work by Shawn Kelley (*Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* [London: Routledge, 2002], esp. 3–4, 12, 14).

[4] Both "race" and "ethnicity" are modern categories. We use them together to emphasize that we always interpret the past using concepts from our own context. We do not presume that they are synonymous or always interchangeable. For a fuller discussion, see Denise Kimber Buell, "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity," *JECS* 10 (2002): 432–41.

[5] Among the important theoretical work on race and ethnicity, we draw especially on the work of Ann Laura Stoler in formulating this fixed/fluid dynamic ("Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 [1997]: 183–206; see also Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities* [New York: Routledge, 1999], 91–94). For their usefulness and applicability in the study of Mediterranean antiquity, see Denise Kimber Buell, "Ethnicity and Religion in Mediterranean Antiquity and Beyond," *RelSRev* 26, no. 3 (2000): 243, 246; eadem, "Race and Universalism," 432–41; and Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 17–25, 31–32.

[6] See Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race," 451–53, 457–58, 471–72.

[7] The identification and analysis of this paradox are condensed from Buell's current book-length work on the significance of ethnicity and race for the study of early Christian self-definition.

universalistic and egalitarian ideals inherent in earliest Christianity. This kind of universal and inclusive vision of early Christianity has enabled antiracist reforms and has been central to the biblical interpretations of many ethnic and racial minorities.[8] When ethnoracial differences are understood as natural and are used to explain and justify social inequalities, then it can be liberative to argue that some of Paul's teachings—and subsequent Christian interpretations of them—offer an alternative vision for human community, in which such differences are transcended, made irrelevant, or obliterated.

On the negative side, however, this understanding of Christianity can have both racist and anti-Jewish effects. The view of early Christian universalism as non-ethnic can lead us to ignore the racism of our own interpretive frameworks and overlook how early Christian discourse relies on ancient modes of "othering." Gay Byron's recent study demonstrates the polemical use of color symbolism in early Christian writings, including polemics that uncomfortably anticipate modern forms of racism.[9] Furthermore, interpreting Christian universalism as non-ethnic enables Christian anti-Judaism by defining a positive attribute of Christianity (universalism) at the expense of Judaism. Judaism is portrayed as everything Christianity is not: legalistic, ethnic, particular, limited, and so on.[10]

We want to avoid this paradox so as to further antiracist goals without also perpetuating Christian anti-Judaism. By adopting an alternative approach to ethnicity and race, we arrive at different understandings of Paul's writings. Our theoretical position is that ethnicity and race are material and discursive concepts structured by the dynamic tension between claims to "realness" and fluidity. This model suits our contemporary situation of increasing diversity in North America better than a naturalized understanding of ethnicity and race. By attending to how ethnicity and race are always shifting, always implicated in political and ideological structures, we can imagine ways of transforming ethnoracial oppression currently structured around notions of absolute difference. This dynamic model is also well suited to supporting a vision of human relations in which difference is reimagined as a source of strength and ground

[8] See, e.g., Vincent Wimbush, "Reading Texts as Reading Ourselves: A Chapter in the History of African-American Biblical Interpretation," in *Reading from this Place,* vol. 1, *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 103–8. We are using the phrase "ethnic and racial minorities" in the sense described by Segovia (*Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 158–59 n. 3): "to mean individuals from social groups, whether culturally (ethnic) or physically (racial) identified as such, who have traditionally been considered inferior within a scale of stratification set up by the West. . . ."

[9] Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3, 5–6, 8, 11–13, 122–29.

[10] Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 3.

for transformation rather than something that ought to be obliterated in the name of a homogenizing universalism.[11]

If we interpret Paul by viewing ethnicity as a dynamic discourse that negotiates between the poles of fixity and fluidity, then Gal 3:28 can be seen as an attempt to define a communal vision in terms of ethnicity—not over against ethnicity.[12] Paul uses "ethnic reasoning" to solve the problem of the exclusion of gentiles from God's promises to Israel.[13] He constructs his arguments within the scope of ethnoracial discourse, but shifts the terms of membership and the relationship between existing groups—Greek and Judean—such that they can be brought into an ethnoracial relationship with one another.[14] Ethnic reasoning serves Paul well in that it offers a model of unity and connection among peoples while still maintaining differences. He preserves the categories of Greek or gentile and Judean while uniting them, hierarchically ("first the Judean, then the Greek"), under the umbrella of Abraham's descendants and God's people.[15] This hierarchy may prove troubling if one looks to Paul's arguments to accomplish antiracist work. Nonetheless, we think our dynamic model of ethnicity is more adequate even if it produces some new challenges. As we will show, reading Paul in this way can be a first step toward dismantling inter-

[11] On this last point, we agree with both Diana L. Hayes's and Fernando F. Segovia's criticisms of the "melting pot" vision of assimilation that compels conformity to a hegemonic ideal (see Hayes, "To Be the Bridge: Voices from the Margins," and Segovia, "Melting and Dreaming in America: Visions and Re-visions," both in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins* [ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001], 60–64, 231–45, respectively).

[12] Our reading shares some interpretive ground with that of Sze-kar Wan's provocative diasporic readings of Gal 3:28 insofar as he also argues that Paul "does not wish to erase ethnic differences" (Sze-kar Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality? An Asian-American Reading of Galatians," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders* [ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Bible and Postcolonialism 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 126). Some of the differences between our reading and Wan's will emerge below when we examine Gal 3:26–29 more closely.

[13] "Ethnic reasoning" is a term coined by Denise K. Buell to refer to the set of discursive strategies whereby ancient authors construe collective identity in terms of peoplehood (Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race," 451; and eadem, "Race and Universalism," 432–41).

[14] We translate *Ioudaios* as "Judean" instead of "Jew" to call attention to the complexity of this term in the ancient context. *Ioudaios*, like the parallel terms *Hellēn*, *Aigyptos*, and so on, could refer to geographic homeland, loyalty to a particular god or gods, adherence to specific laws, participation in religious practices, claims to ancestry, or any combination of these. "Judean," even if unfamiliar to modern ears, reminds us that *Ioudaios* serves as a complex, flexible, ethnic designation much like "Greek," "Egyptian," or "Syrian" (among many others). For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Caroline Johnson Hodge, "'If Sons, then Heirs': A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in Paul's Letters" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2002), 153–55; and eadem, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities: Judeans and Gentiles in Romans 11:17–24," in *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City: Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome* (ed. J. Zangenburg and M. Labahn; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

[15] See Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities."

pretations that continue to construct a non-ethnic, universal Christianity over and against an ethnic, particular Judaism.

I. The Politics of Interpretation in Prior Interpreters of Paul

Both racist and antiracist interpretations of Paul emerge in response to modern, naturalized understandings of race and ethnicity. These understandings are rooted in Western imperialist practices that classify humans according to taxonomies portrayed as physiological, heritable, and correlative with mental and moral capacities—all under the guise of objective scientific "knowledge" about race, sex, and sexuality.[16]

Ideas about race as a natural, transmissible essence inform the way that Jewishness and Christianness have been defined in relation to each other.[17] Paul has traditionally been located as the figure on the borderline between Christianity and Judaism. Adolf Harnack wrote in 1901: "It was Paul who delivered the Christian religion from Judaism."[18] In this line of thinking, Paul actively transforms Judaism from an ethnic religion—linked to one people and characterized by observance of the law—to a spiritual religion open to all, which becomes Christianity. Harnack's views continue a nineteenth-century preoccupation in Pauline scholarship over the extent to which Paul was Jewish or hellenized.[19] This very distinction presumes that Jewishness and Hellenism are contrasting categories, a view that has only recently been challenged. For Ferdinand Christian Baur and other members of the Tübingen school—as for Harnack—Paul unlocked the problem of how a universal religion like Christianity could evolve from a particularistic one like Judaism. In Baur's view, Paul shaped Christianity under the influence of Hellenism.[20] This is a Lamarckian

[16] See, e.g., Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, "Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism," in *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (ed. Sandra Harding; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 170–93; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21–56, 232–57.

[17] See Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race," 451–58.

[18] Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity? Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter Term 1899–1900* (trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons/London: Williams & Norgate, 1901), 190; see John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

[19] For an excellent discussion of this issue, see the essays in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). The following articles in this volume were especially helpful to us: Dale B. Martin, "Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question," 29–61; and Wayne A. Meeks, "Judaism, Hellenism, and the Birth of Christianity," 17–27.

[20] See Shawn Kelley's description of Baur's reconstruction of early Christianity (*Racializing*

notion, viewing Paul as having acquired a trait during his lifetime (namely, Hellenistic universalism) that becomes a hereditary trait for his "progeny."

Other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, notably Robert Henry Charles and Gerhard Kittel, offered a different explanation for the origins of Christian universalism and Paul's role in establishing it.[21] For them, Christian universalism has Jewish roots: Paul is inspired not by Hellenism but by a particular strand within Judaism, sometimes identified as apocalyptic, sometimes as prophetic. These scholars cast Paul—and Christianity—as embodying a lost, universalizing Jewish ideal in the face of other contemporary forms of Judaism that are portrayed as "dried-up legalism." Whether looking to Hellenism or Judaism, all these scholars identify a universalizing precedent for Paul's Christianity, and universalism is defined especially in contrast to ethnoracial particularity.

These arguments rely on specific assumptions about how religion relates to race and ethnicity. Some of the influential early figures in the academic study of religion, like Cornelius Tiele, argued that most religions are ethnically or nationally linked, whereas a rare few transcend this limit, becoming universal—like Christianity. Universal religions were often depicted as the evolutionary successors to religions associated with a particular social group or region. The distinction between religions viewed as ethnoracially linked and those that are universal (in aspiration if not in reality) carries with it a value judgment: the ideal is to transcend the particular.[22] Paul's writings have been interpreted to depict Christianity as a de-ethnicized and therefore superior version of Judaism.

Paul is often positioned as the evolutionary link between an ethnic and a non-ethnic, universal kind of religion. He is understood to be "ethnically" a

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Jesus, 75–80). Kelley's important study calls attention to the ways "racial discourses" were first incorporated into major intellectual movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and then integrated into biblical scholarship.

[21] On Gerhard Kittel, see Wayne A. Meeks's forthcoming article, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible: The Strange Case of Gerhard Kittel," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretations* (Brill, forthcoming). We are grateful to Wayne Meeks for making a draft of the article available to us before publication.

[22] Cornelius P. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 1:45, 124–26; and Crawford Howell Toy, *Judaism and Christianity: A Sketch of the Progress of Thought from Old Testament to New Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1891), 1–45, esp. 30–34. We glimpse this evolutionary logic in Arthur Darby Nock's classic study on conversion. Nock, like Kittel, sees Judaism as having unrealized universal potential. Christianity, in contrast, he views as having emerged from Judaism precisely by departing from a national, ethnic restriction to include gentiles actively in its prophetic vision. For Nock, it is not the prophetic vision per se that makes Christianity separate from Judaism but rather its fully actualized universal scope (Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* [1933; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988], 187–90).

Ioudaios yet seen either to eliminate its soteriological significance or to subdivide the category of *Ioudaios* into a hierarchical pair: spirit/flesh, privileging the spiritual component but rejecting the relevance of the fleshly. This kind of distinction most often conveys a negative view of Judaism because Christianity's universalism is defined as an improvement on the particularity of Judaism; Christianity is here correlated with the spiritual and Judaism with the "flesh."[23]

Another scholarly tendency is to interpret Paul's use of ethnoracial categories as metaphorical or spiritual, as in this example from the entry that includes *Ioudaios* in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*: Walter Gutbrod states that, by *Ioudaios*, Paul does not have in mind "specific adherents of this nation and religion," but a "type abstracted from individual representatives," a "spiritual or religious magnitude."[24]

In the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars began to challenge these readings on a number of different fronts.[25] In his pioneering essay in 1963, Krister Stendahl called attention to the Lutheran-Augustinian theologies that inform much traditional Pauline scholarship.[26] Stendahl argued that Paul should be read as a *Ioudaios* in the context of other Jewish authors and not in contrast to them. The insight that Paul was not a "Christian" complicates easy and early distinctions between "Christian" and *Ioudaios*. An emphasis on Paul's Judeanness makes possible reconstructions of the first-century relationship of Christ-believers to "Jewishness" as one of continuity and porousness—as part of one tradition, while emphasizing its diversity. These arguments have been crucial for intervening in Christian anti-Judaism and for rethinking the possible futures of Christianity.

In the following decades, E. P. Sanders among others contributed to this shift in Pauline studies. He especially challenged the view that first-century Judaism was based on a "works righteousness" to which Paul's teaching of faith has been typically contrasted.[27] Nonetheless, he still pitted an ethnically linked

[23] Katharina von Kellenbach writes, "the left-wing myth asserts that Jews are an anachronistic religious and national group . . . , opposed to universal egalitarianism and internationalism" (*Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* [AAR Cultural Criticism 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994], 42).

[24] Walter Gutbrod, "Ἰσραήλ, Ἰσραηλίτης, Ἰουδαίος, Ἰουδαῖα, Ἰουδαϊκός, Ἰουδαίζω, Ἰουδαϊσμός, Ἑβραίος, Ἑβραϊκός, ἑβραῖς, ἑβραϊστί," *TDNT* 6:380.

[25] John Barclay discusses this wave of Pauline scholarship with slightly different emphases ("'Neither Jew Nor Greek': Multiculturalism and the New Perspective on Paul," in *Ethnicity and the Bible* [ed. Mark G. Brett; Boston: Brill, 2002], 199–209).

[26] Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215.

[27] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); and idem *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

Judaism against a universalizing Christianity, seeing Paul as adandoning the former for the latter. More recently, Daniel Boyarin has also stressed that Paul was and remained a *Ioudaios;* Paul's writings about Christ need to be understood within the multiplicity of Judaeanness.[28] Boyarin reads Paul's mode of Jewishness in light of the traditional Hellenism/Jewishness dichotomy, arguing that Paul articulates a form of Greek-inspired Jewishness that is universalizing and spiritualizing, over and against a particular and embodied form of Jewishness. While revaluing the consequences of Paul's "radical" Judaism, by problematizing his universalizing move, Boyarin nevertheless preserves ethnicity firmly on the "particular" side of a universal/particular dichotomy.

In recent decades, many scholars have used the topic of ethnicity to argue that Paul is trying to solve tensions between "Jewish Christians" and "gentile Christians."[29] This research often shares a common blind spot with discussions of race in America. "Jewish Christians" are the "marked," ethnically specific group, characterized by particularity. "Gentile Christians," by contrast, are treated as the unmarked or ethnically neutral group (which also implies theologically "mainstream"), much like "white" has functioned until recently. While these studies focus on ethnicity, they tend to treat gentiles as a non-ethnic concept in Paul's writings. As we will show, this masks the way in which ethnic reasoning is central to Paul's articulations of the gospel.

We appreciate the shift that has taken place in mainstream Pauline scholarship and aim to push it further. Appealing to Paul's ethnoreligious background implies that there is something we gain by stating that Paul was a *Ioudaios*. Accordingly, a central interpretive question has become, What kind of *Ioudaios* was he? Paul's writings about Jewishness or Judeanness are interpreted as differing from other understandings of Judeanness primarily with respect to the significance of ethnicity or race, as if these were fixed. Paul's kind of Jewishness is portrayed as one that severs the connection between religion and ethnoracial identity, so that "ethnic *Ioudaioi*" and people with other ethnoracial identities—the *ethnē*, the gentiles—can be unified through allegiance to the God of Israel. So Paul becomes a representative of a universalizing Jewishness in contrast to some other forms in which particularity—notably ethnoracial particularity—remains a central aspect of communal self-definition. This rendering of Paul relies on the views that (1) ethnicity or race is given; that

[28] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

[29] See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38A–B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), esp. 1:xliv–liv; James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1983); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993); and Joel Marcus, "The Circumcision and Uncircumcision in Rome," *NTS* 35 (1989): 67–81.

(2) universalizing teachings are formulated over and against ethnoracial particularity; and that (3) other *Ioudaioi* understood Judeanness to be given and particular. This line of argument keeps the interpretation of Paul and his writings within the scope of Judeanness but preserves the logic traditionally used to differentiate Christianness from Jewishness. Even though the discourse shifts to differences among Judeans, it fails to overcome the anti-Jewish implications.

If ethnicity and race are understood differently, then we can read Paul differently. Diana Hayes offers one example of what this rethinking might look like. She reimagines Christ-believers as actively shaping the meaning of communal identity in and through their differences, including ethnoracial differences, creating a multiform plurality. Instead of striving to mark an either/or between Jewish and Christian, Hayes writes that "the church was not only Jewish but also Greek, Roman, and African."[30] She uses the image of mixture rather than "melting pot" to form a reconstruction of the first century that emerges from a critical analysis of race in the contemporary American landscape. Gay Byron's work, however, keeps us from overly romanticizing this multicultural mixture, since in early Christian rhetoric, the Ethiopian and Egyptian are used to symbolize both positive and negative aspects of Christian identity.[31] The next section demonstrates how this dynamic model of ethnicity and race can be used to read Paul's rhetoric in ways that avoid reinscribing some modern forms of racist and anti-Jewish logic.

II. Analysis of Paul

Interpretations that trace a universal Christianity to Paul's letters often depict his ideal religion as separate from ethnicity. In contrast, we see ethnicity and religion as intertwined and mutually constituting, a position that is supported by the parameters of Paul's text. He crafts arguments that portray religious practices as creating, maintaining, or transforming ethnicity.[32] Religious practices can be used to support either the fluidity or fixity of ethnicity or, more often, to mediate between these poles.[33] While religious practices can be adopted or rejected, and thus illustrate the fluidity of ethnicity, they are also understood to embody ethnicity's fixity because religious practices both produce and reinforce kinship ties. Paul highlights both kinship and religious prac-

[30] Hayes, "To Be the Bridge," 57.

[31] Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference*, *passim*; see esp. 5–13, 17–18, 55–121.

[32] Paul is not unique in treating ethnicity and religious identity as mutually constituting. See Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race," 458–66.

[33] This argument is developed in Buell's current book project using a range of ancient Mediterranean examples.

tice as what give ethnoracial identity its fixed substance. But even apparent fixity can be malleable. Although genealogical claims often lend a sense of fixity to Jewishness, Paul understands genealogies to be flexible. Gentiles, for example, can gain Abraham as their ancestor. Furthermore, Paul suggests that shifts in religious practices can accomplish a shift in ancestry, especially for members of non-Judean peoples.

Following biblical models, Paul assumes a boundary between the descendants of a chosen lineage from Abraham, the people of the Judean God, and other peoples, who are not in good standing with this God.[34] Often he chooses totalizing language for non-Judeans, such as "gentiles" or "uncircumcised," terms that, like "barbarian," erase particularities among non-Judeans. Paul is using a familiar form of ethnic reasoning when employing these totalizing dichotomies—this is what Jonathan Hall has called oppositional ethnic self-definition.[35] This language functions rhetorically to mask ethnic characteristics specific to each group included in the *ethnē,* or gentiles, a masking that recurs in scholarly distinctions between "Jewish" and "Gentile" Christians.

In Romans Paul describes Judeans with specific reference to Judean history, practices, and ancestry, all of which convey their special standing as God's chosen people. Israelite identity is rooted in the stories of their ancestors, the covenants and promises that established them as adopted sons of God, and the law and cult service that mark this relationship and govern their lives as a people (Rom 9:4–5).

While the Judeans reap these benefits of loyalty to their God, the gentiles by contrast suffer the consequences of having rejected this God. In Rom 1:18–26, Paul characterizes gentiles by their rejection of the Judean God, their loyalty to other gods, their cultic practices, and their resulting moral failures. Religious deviance is held up as proof of a rift that is simultaneously marked as soteriological and genealogical—ethnicity and religiosity are intertwined. Paul accuses the gentiles of idolatry, a Judean strategy that circumscribes and defines alterity in both religious and ethnic terms.[36] Ethnic identity, religious practices and loyalties, and moral standing are inextricable in Paul's description of "others."

[34] We have developed the following analysis of Paul from Johnson Hodge, "'If Sons, Then Heirs': A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in Paul's Letters" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2002).

[35] Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47.

[36] The portrayal of the idolatrous non-Judean often includes the following practices and conceptions: the worship of images or objects instead of God, a loss of control of passions, and the resulting participation in vices. In Paul's view, the potential for self-mastery depends on loyalty to the Judean God. Gentiles gave this up long ago and have been vice-ridden ever since. On self-mastery in Paul, see Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 42–82.

Indeed, Paul formulates his central theological problem in terms of ethnicity: gentile alienation from the God of Israel. Not surprisingly, then, Paul conceives of the solution also in terms of kinship and ethnicity. On the one hand, the differences between gentiles and Judeans seem fixed, having some real content; on the other hand, it is also fluid—through Christ the gentiles receive a new ancestry and a new identity. Far from treating ethnicity as something merely fixed which Christ has broken, Paul portrays Christ as an agent of ethnic transformation. His argument presupposes that his audience can imagine ethnicity and kinship as fluid, despite his oppositional distinctions between Judean and gentile.

Capitalizing on the availability of many ways to imagine relatedness among peoples, Paul creates a new way of speaking about gentile kinship with the Judean God and other humans: by receiving the spirit during baptism "into" Christ, gentiles are made "sons of God."[37] This new patrilineal kinship construction weaves together notions of ethnic fixity and fluidity. Baptism, as a religious ritual, is a voluntary act for Paul's gentiles. Yet the way Paul frames it, the effectiveness of the ritual depends on assumptions about essence—the essence of the spirit—that parallel assumptions about shared blood in other kinship contexts. Galatians 4:1–7 describes the process of gentiles receiving the spirit of Christ into their hearts. In this context, a religious ritual accomplishes a permanent transformation.

Paul establishes a kinship for gentiles with Israel that is based not on shared blood but on shared spirit. This kinship is portrayed as even more "real" than that of blood, so it is a mistake to interpret Paul's rhetoric in terms of a mere metaphor. At baptism gentiles receive something of the "stuff" of Christ when they receive his *pneuma*. Christ serves as the link for the gentiles to the lineage of Abraham. The dynamism of ethnic reasoning is evident here: baptism encapsulates the fluidity, figured as a ritual of adoption, in which one gains the spirit that imbues the recipient with a new, permanent, nature.

Paul articulates the new relationships established for gentiles in the following well-known passage from Galatians:

> For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through that faithfulness. As many of you as were baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. There is no Judaean or Greek; there is no slave or free; there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26–29)

This passage makes vivid the tensive combination of fluidity and fixity: ritually, one's identity can be transformed through baptism. That transformation, how-

[37] We translate *huioi* as "sons" to signal Paul's patrilineal and patriarchal logic (see Johnson Hodge, "'If Sons, Then Heirs,'" 8–9, 72, 125, 129).

ever, results in an identity marked by a privileged sign of fixity: inclusion in a lineage. Paul constructs a myth of collective identity for his gentiles; they can trace their beginnings not only to their baptism into Christ but also to their ancestor, Abraham.

The language of being "in" or "a part of" Christ permeates Gal 3:26–29. With this language, Paul calls upon a widespread understanding of the relationship between ancestors and descendants in antiquity: offspring are contained in their forebears, whether in their seed or womb or some other way. This containment language reflects a kinship ideology in which members of kin groups understand that they have a common founding ancestor and that they share the same status and traits as that ancestor.

Judean biblical histories manifest this logic. Throughout Genesis, "in" language is used specifically for moments of covenant making through a faithful ancestor, when blessings are passed from one generation to the next. It often identifies the chosen heir and carrier of the blessings in each new generation. For example, the God of Israel proclaims to Abraham: "And in your seed shall all the *ethnē* of the earth be blessed (LXX Gen 22:17–18). Genesis records similar statements to Isaac and Jacob, heirs of Abraham's lineage (Gen 26:4; 28:13–14). Reflecting patriarchal values, these stories depict covenants with *male* ancestors, a patrilineal ideology.

Drawing on these Septuagint examples, Paul uses this "in" language with Abraham ("all the gentiles will be blessed in you" [Gal 3:8, citing Gen 12:3 and 18:18]) and with Isaac ("your seed will be said to be in Isaac" [Rom 9:7, citing Gen 21:12]). With Christ, however, Paul plays with this patrilineal ideology; he adapts it to describe the new kinship between Christ and the gentiles. Paul relates this kinship creation to baptism, which he presents as a ritual means of entering "into" Christ: the preposition *eis* (Gal 3:27) connotes a sense of motion toward or into. Paul uses this same language in two other baptism passages, Rom 6:3 ("all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus") and 1 Cor 12:13 ("we were baptized into one body").[38] Baptism ushers gentiles "into" Christ; it forges a kinship relationship between them and Christ. Immediately following Gal 3:26–29, Paul describes how the gentiles receive the spirit of Christ in their hearts, making them no longer minors or slaves, but sons and heirs (Gal 4:1–7).[39] In the same way that descendants share the same "stuff" as ancestors,

[38] Also see 1 Cor 1:13, where Paul upbraids the Corinthians with this question: "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" Likewise in 1 Cor 10:2 Paul reports that "our ancestors . . . were baptized into Moses."

[39] See Rom 8:14–17 for a parallel passage. Although Paul does use the gender-neutral "children of God" in Rom 8:16 and 17, in Gal 3 he uses "son" (*huios*, which the NRSV translates as "child"). Paul's image of gentile upward mobility is highly gendered in both passages: it is based on the patriarchal privilege of sons. This is further reflected in Paul's term for adoption: *huiothesia*, literally "placing a son" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5).

gentiles are "of Christ"—they have taken in his *pneuma*—so that he can serve as a link for them to the lineage of Abraham.

The relationship between Christ and gentiles, however, is not expressed in terms of ancestor and descendants. Instead, Christ and the gentiles seem to be same-generation offspring of common ancestors. Galatians 3:26 identifies gentiles-in-Christ as "sons of God." Romans 8:29 refers to Christ as the "first-born among many brothers." Romans 8:17 calls newly adopted gentiles "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." Being baptized into Christ, the gentiles "put on" Christ and are adopted as his younger siblings.[40] In this ritual of initiation into a new family, the gentiles receive the ancestry of their new kin: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29).

While genealogies often function to signal particularity, Gal 3:26–29 has more often been interpreted as fostering egalitarian universalism. More than any other passage in Paul's corpus, Gal 3:28 is cited to support the contention that baptism into Christ erases social distinctions. In our interpretation this verse does not erase ethnic particularity but is itself a form of ethnic reasoning.

As we read Paul, being in Christ is not ethnically neutral; it is a Judean identity. With this "in" language, Paul evokes the biblical motif of Israelite descendants being collectively located "in" their ancestors; it is a *Judean* strategy for authorizing and reinforcing inheritance from one generation to the next. Unity in Christ produces a new kinship for gentiles, but not just any kinship—specifically descent from Abraham, the founding ancestor of the Judeans. As one "born out of the seed of David by birth" (notice the appeal to a "natural" or fixed kinship) and one who was "appointed the son of God" (an explicitly acquired kinship) (Rom 1:3, 4), Christ is the link for gentiles to the lineage of Abraham. For Paul, being a gentile in Christ means being one who has secured a place within the larger network of Israel.

Galatians 3:28 is part of an extended argument to gentiles about their particular situation. Paul's form of ethnic reasoning to resolve the problem of gentile alienation from God was probably not the only one. As feminist scholars have argued, Paul shapes his arguments as one seeking to secure authority and legitimacy, not as one already invested with these.[41] The tone of this letter

[40] The language of "putting on" Christ as though he were a garment has led some to believe that this is a reference to a baptismal practice among Christ-followers of removing their clothes for the ritual and putting them back on again afterward. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 151. Sam K. Williams admits that this is an attractive idea but argues that Paul's use of *endyō* here could easily have come from a tradition of LXX usage in which this verb meant "to be characterized by the named quality or attribute" (*Galatians* [ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997], 105). Thus the newly baptized take on a new Christ-like identity.

[41] E.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 169–70; Antoinette Clark Wire, *The*

makes clear that he is trying to persuade the Galatians to obey him when they apparently have not, and it is anachronistic to assume that Paul's views were dominant in his day. Paul's repeated criticisms of gentile circumcision may indicate that circumcision was one solution to bringing gentile men into right relation with the God of Israel. Paul attempts a different solution by subordinating a range of social identities to being "in Christ."[42]

Does this prioritizing of being in Christ eliminate the other various measures of identity—Judean, Greek, slave, free, male, and female? We do not think so. We think it is possible to imagine all of these identities existing at once, even as one is privileged. Anthropologist Judith Nagata offers a valuable modern example of how people in multiethnic contexts unproblematically maintain several different ethnic identities, fluctuating among them according to circumstances.[43] This model of multiple identities is helpful for understanding the rhetorical force of Gal 3:28. Paul does indeed imagine a unity among those who are in Christ. Yet even within this unity, distinctions do not disappear. Paul himself is both a *Ioudaios* and in Christ. His addressees are both gentiles and in Christ. Paul appeals to permanence or essence while simultaneously constructing these various identities as malleable. This model vividly and materially manifests the dynamism of ethnicity we are presupposing.

Sze-kar Wan argues for a similar interpretation of Gal 3:28. He uses the postcolonial concept of hybridity to argue that Paul creates an identity not "by erasing ethnic and cultural differences but by *combining these differences into a hybrid existence*."[44] In Wan's view, Gal 3:28 can be paraphrased in light of a postcolonial Asian-American hermeneutics [as]—paradoxically—"You are *both* Jew and Greek, *both* free and slave, *both* male *and* female, for you are all one in

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Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 1–11.

[42] Johnson Hodge has described Paul's argument as a "prioritizing" of identities for gentiles ("'If Sons, Then Heirs,'" 199–206). Barclay interprets Paul similarly ("'Neither Jew Nor Greek,'" 197–214). Partly in response to Boyarin, Barclay writes: "Paul does not, I believe, 'erase' or 'eradicate' cultural specificities, but relativizes them" (p. 211). Stowers discusses hierarchies of "goods," and especially the notion of a unitary, highest good in his comparison of Pauline Christianity and Hellenistic schools: "Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Engberg-Pedersen, 81–102.

[43] Judith A. Nagata, "What Is a Malay? Situational Selection of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society," *American Ethnologist* 1 (1974): 331–50. Other anthropologists who have adopted similar models of identity are Charles F. Keyes, "Towards a New Formulation of the Concept of Ethnic Group," *Ethnicity* 3 (1976): 202–13; Michael Moerman, "Ethnic Identification in a Complex Civilization: Who are the Lue?" *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965): 1215–30; and Carter Bentley, "Ethnicity and Practice," *Journal for the Comparative Study of Society and History* 29 (1987): 24–55.

[44] Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality?" 126 (emphasis in original).

Christ Jesus." In this dialectic conception, universality is upheld, but it is universality that is predicated on, requires, and is erected on the foundation of cultural and ethnic particularities.[45]

While we agree with Wan's reading that Paul does not erase ethnic and cultural differences, we differ both in our reading of the outcome of Paul's vision and in its implications for power relations among Christ-believers. Wan sees Paul as creating a new "people" that is a hybridized form of both Jew and Greek. We are not so certain that Paul does envision a new people, distinct from Israel—he certainly does not formulate the concept of Christians, Jewish or otherwise.

Furthermore, we read Paul as preserving not simply ethnic differences within Israel but also power differences among its members, unlike Wan, who proposes that Paul attempts to "erase the power differential" with the formulation "in Christ there is no Jew or Greek."[46] In our view, Paul's conception is ethnically complex *and* asymmetrical: Paul does not explicitly ask his gentiles to become Judeans or to cease to be Greeks, yet it is a Judean umbrella under which he locates all those "in Christ." Paul asks gentiles or Greeks to reject their gods, religious practices, and stories of origin and to adopt instead the God of Israel, Christ, the narrative of Israel, and its founding ancestor. Gentiles in Christ have thus shifted components of their identities that change them from gentile ethnoreligious "others" to gentiles affiliated with Israel.

Paul's metaphor of an olive tree in Rom 11:17–24 illustrates this hierarchical relationship. Paul warns the gentiles that they are a "wild olive shoot" that has been grafted onto the tree, while the Judeans are "natural branches." Paul arranges these two peoples assymmetrically, "first the Judean and then the Greek" (Rom 1:16; 2:9–10). Indeed, the tension between these two peoples, which Paul describes throughout Rom 9–11, propels salvation history as Paul understands it, until the final outcome in which "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom 11:26). In this ethnic family tree, the grafted branches have a more tenuous attachment and can be broken off easily at the will of the one who prunes the

[45] Ibid., 127 (emphasis in original). Wan writes: "what I think Paul is calling for in Galatians is for each cultural entity to give up its claims to power . . . in the creation of this new people, *without*, however, giving up its cultural specificities" (p. 126; emphasis in original). Barclay seems to agree when he argues that Paul "does not install Christ as the founder of a new culture, but indicates how commitment to Christ can simultaneously *encompass* various cultural particularities" ("'Neither Jew Nor Greek,'" 211; emphasis in original).

[46] Although see Wan's more recent work on this issue in Romans: "Collection for the Saints as an Anti-Colonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation; Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 191–215. Wan still argues that Paul constructs a new *ethnos*, but here Wan sees a hierarchical relationship between Jews in Christ and gentiles in Christ (p. 208), which is closer to our position.

tree. While both peoples are subject to the will of this horticulturalist God, the gentiles are less secure than the Judeans.[47]

Paul's rhetoric relies on rather than obliterates ideas about ethnicity in defining communal identity. If we understand ethnic identity not as static and monolithic but as flexible and complex, then we can read Paul as implying a distinction between Greeks and Judeans in Christ and those who are not. We could now ask how Paul's attempts to put Greeks and Judeans into relation to one another affects the meaning of Greekness and Judeanness for those not in Christ. At the very least, by positioning Judeanness and Greekness in relation to Christ in Gal 3:28, he is underscoring their fluidity—what these concepts can mean is subject to revision, even as they are still held up as meaningful categories.

In this reading of Paul, it is impossible to separate religion from ethnicity. There is no ethnically neutral "Christianity" implied in Gal 3:28. Paul's gospel to the gentiles is that through Christ, they receive a new ancestry and a new status before the God of Israel. Paul draws upon elements perceived as fixed—ideologies of kinship as well as understandings of the spirit in baptism—to authorize his creative construction of gentiles in Christ. We are not denying that Paul develops universalizing arguments. Instead, we have called into question how ethnicity has functioned in explaining his universalism. By understanding ethnicity as "given," interpreters have defined universalism in opposition to ethnicity, requiring them to make Paul's uses of ethnic reasoning consistent with a universalizing teaching evacuated of ethnic self-definition. We have argued, on the contrary, that Paul's universalizing vision relies on portraying the reconciliation of the *ethnē* with God in ethnoracial terms.

III. Conclusion

What are the consequences of this reading? We read Paul as structuring the relations between Judeans and gentiles hierarchically, even while uniting them as descendants of a common ancestor. We find that a dynamic approach to race and ethnicity does not produce an interpretation of Paul's vision as ideal, insofar as it structurally subordinates one ethnoracial group to another.[48] Indeed, Paul was interpreted by some German Christians of the Third Reich as supporting an internal hierarchy along perceived racial lines *within* Christian communities.[49] Such interpretations need to be challenged not by insisting that

[47] For a fuller discussion of the passage about the olive tree, see Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities" (forthcoming).

[48] Barclay is more optimistic about using Paul as a model for harmonious, multicultural communities than we are ("'Neither Jew nor Greek,'" 209–14).

[49] E.g., Georg Wobbermin: "The apostle Paul, to be sure, wrote in Galatians that there is nei-

Paul's writings deny the saliency of ethnicity, but by emphasizing the fluidity and messiness of ethnoracial categories. By analyzing how Paul recrafts the possible meanings of Judeanness and Greekness, we are better equipped to reimagine and envision communities in which differences are neither erased nor hierarchically ranked.

We live in a moment when race and ethnicity have been theorized as social constructs but remain categories that continue to have immense socioeconomic, political, and spiritual effects. These effects extend to both the ethnoracial composition of scholars in biblical studies and the methods that are considered "mainstream," which graduate students must "master." Our aim has been to expose and challenge the primary assumptions of the mainstream and to suggest how interpretations of Paul can benefit from reimagining ethnicity and race. The familiar idea that Christian identity renders ethnoracial differences irrelevant provides a problematic loophole for white scholars to deny or overlook the saliency of race in our own interpretive frameworks.[50] We hope to close this loophole with a complex, dynamic understanding of collective identity that sharpens our choices for the struggles of the present to create a more just world for all.

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ther Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female because all are one in Jesus Christ. This position, however, did not prevent him from distinguishing between men and women with respect to church order. Women, he prescribed, were to keep silent in the church. Thus there also may be distinctions in church order between Jew and Greek or Aryan and non-Aryan. Today we must honor this distinction in order to protect the unity of German spiritual life" (cited in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 172).

[50] This tendency is only compounded by disciplinary conventions that value a detached interpretive stance over an engaged one. Scholars who adopt engaged critical frameworks have repeatedly called attention to this problem, often underscoring the ways that the marginalization of engaged approaches needs to be addressed simultaneously as one of theory and practice, since social and theoretical marginalization frequently occur hand in hand. See, e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 1–14, 72–81; Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 157–77. On the "loophole," see, e.g., the challenges by James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 130–33. It is necessary to ask whether and how the assertion that race is irrelevant to Christianness, in the hands of the white Christians, has rendered assertions of Christian universalism complicit with racism. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith view this complicity as arising from Protestant ideals of individualism that obscure the systemic character of racism. By insisting on the nonracist character of Christianity and viewing racism as an individual rather than systemic problem, white evangelicals often view themselves as nonracist and lack the strategies to tackle racism on an institutionalized and cultural level (*Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]). See also Randall Bailey's overview of African-American biblical interpreters who have posed such challenges to white biblical interpreters (Randall C. Bailey, "Academic Biblical Interpretation among African Americans in the United States," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* [ed. Vincent Wimbush, with the assistance of Rosamund Rodman; New York: Continuum, 2000], 700–701).

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